



# Cultural Values in *Koromogae* Reflecting Japanese People's Identity

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**Abstract.** This study focuses on cultural values in *koromogae*. *Koromogae* is a clothes-changing culture based on Japanese seasons, such as when entering summer and winter. This research used a descriptive-qualitative method. The data, which were conversation pieces of Japanese people's activities during *koromogae*, were collected and analyzed, from which conclusion was made. The data were analyzed using the cultural identity theory, *wabi* theory, and *mottainai* culture. The analysis results showed that *koromogae* culture had aesthetic, cleanliness, and economical values.

**Keywords:** Cultural value, Identity, Japanese people, *Koromogae*, *Mottainai*

## 1 Introduction

Discussion on clothes is a complex and long story that from ancient times human had used them for protection despite their simple form although they were only made of tree bark, leaves, or leather. In line with human culture development, clothes are of the basic needs. This, referred to as the need for clothing, keeps evolving with changing trends from time to time. Every culture has its own peculiar clothes that may show its identity, culture, and lifestyle and even has formed social stratification in the community's social layers [1]. Besides, a community's clothes may show its natural conditions and ethics.

In Japan, the way of dressing rules is included as one of the 21 national ethics that also means as to "Correct Western way of dressing for each season for men and women" [2]. Japan as a country of four seasons (Shindo, 2015: 31) [3] regulates its people to adapt their clothes to season. The cultural practice of changing clothes from summer to winter or vice versa is called *koromogae* 衣替え [4]. In other words, *koromogae* is associated with clothes changing culture by climate. Geographically, Japan is of mild climate under effect of seasonal wind or monsoon [5]; and as an archipelagic country surrounded by the sea, such conditions greatly influence its people's life pattern such as dressing culture. Historically, the *koromogae* culture started from about

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the eighth century during the Heian period introduced by China. About the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Tokugawa Shogunate set rules for the samurai class to change their clothes four times annually. However, entering the Meiji Government era (1868) Western clothes entered Japan. The Meiji Government changed the *koromogae* rules into twice in a year that is about the first day of June and the first day of October. The *koromogae* culture for Japanese people is not only a practice of clothes changing from summer clothes (*natsugi*-夏着) into (*fuyugi*-冬着) winter clothes and vice versa, but there are embedded values of life principles as Japanese people within such practices.

Anchoring on such background and Japanese values, this study describes the values reflected in the practices of *koromogae* culture as Japanese people's identity.

## 2 Theoretical Basis

### 2.1 Ethnolinguistics

Ethnolinguistics is a branch of linguistics focusing on language dimension (vocabulary, phrases, clauses, discourse, other lingual units) in broader social and cultural dimension (such as ritual ceremony, cultural event, folklore and others) to advance and maintain the community's cultural practices and social structure [6]. Meanwhile, other opinion argues that ethnolinguistics is a science on the intricacy of correlation of diverse language uses with cultural pattern. In ethnolinguistics' perspective, there is correlation between language and the world view of its speaker. Referring to the abovementioned definition of ethnolinguistics, we may conclude that ethnolinguistics is a science to learn the intricacy of correlation of language use through community and culture.

In this current study, the context of ethnolinguistics employed here is what is being implemented in the cultural event in Japanese community called *koromogae*.

### Meaning, Value, and Identity of Japanese Culture

Culture is closely related to community's life. Every culture arising in the community is symbolized with certain forms containing certain meaning as well [7]. The meaning of culture is the concept contained in the whole system of human's ideas, actions and works acquired from the outcome of learning in community's life taken as the human's possession [8]. Human cannot be separated from culture, and both influence each other. Culture's influence on individual's personality can be found in one's display of behaviors, as reflected in their way of language use, customs and habit. In this study, we would find how Japanese people's identity and personality are reflected in their habit of performing *koromogae* during transition between summer and winter.

With regard to the term "cultural meaning", there is correlation between the term with "cultural value" and "cultural identity" as an abstract, ideal and sensory or visible symptom. Therefore, cultural value can only be known through understanding and

interpretation of human's actions, deeds, and speeches [9]. In this regard, Prosser (1978:303) said that value was the cultural aspect most deeply instilled in a community, and classified it into five: (1) God related value, (2) nature related and oriented value, (3) Time related and oriented value, (4) Activity related and oriented value, and (5) Human relationship related and oriented value [10]. Kluckhohn in Pelly (1994) argued that cultural value was a concept with broad scope existing in the mind realm of most of people in a community, regarding what is most valuable in life [11].

By term, identity can be defined as "*jati diri*" (KBBI, 2020); which is self-reflection derived from family, gender, culture, ethnicity and socialization process [12]. Therefore, this basically refers to reflection of ourselves and others' perception of ourselves. According to Burke and Stets (2009), identity is self-definition of a person as individual that is different in behavior, belief, and attitude [13].

In this study, cultural identity is defined as an individual's or a nation's basic awareness of group's special characteristics in terms of living habits, customs, languages, and values [14].

### **Mottainai Spirit**

*Mottainai* is literally derived from the combined meaning of *kanji* character *mottai* (勿体) "something important" and *nai* (無い) "lack". In general, *mottainai* means stating self-humility and gratitude for something that one actually does not deserve. The *mottainai* spirit is an important part of Japanese people's culture. This can be found in their mindset and real activity of maintaining, using some items and even recycling obsolete and useless items.

Realization of *mottainai* spirit includes actualization through showing feeling bad for disposing of items that can still be used or when valuable items are not made use of properly. In other words, the *mottainai* spirit is taken as the attitude of avoiding wasteful things.

Historically, the *mottainai* spirit has been born in Japanese people's life during Edo Era (1603 – 1868). The lifestyle at that time was far different from current one. For example, a kimono would be kept and worn up to ten or twenty years. Therefore, when *natsugi* or *fuyugi* clothes were not used would be washed and stored well for future use in the years to come.

This way, *mottainai* cannot be defined simply and explicitly, but can deeply be defined as prohibition from wasting something or item. Anything still usable should be used or made use of well first. The *mottainai* spirit is also based on the Bushido ethics of frugality [3].

### **Bigaku Spirit**

Besides based on the *mottainai* spirit, *koromogae* is also based on the *bigaku* spirit. *Bigaku* means *utsukushii* or beauty. This concept prioritizes aesthetics. Japanese people consider aesthetics an integral part of their culture [3]. Aesthetics is taught and practiced as an important part of the national character. Japanese people emphasized beauty that has naturally been existing and one of which is dressing culture. Until now and maybe onwards, appreciation of aesthetics is still an important part of Japanese people's life and keeps influencing anything they do. This beauty aspect is based on samurai's code of ethics as Japanese people's principles. Although in practice of *koromogae* culture there is an activity of storing clothes used in previous years, but Japanese people do not abandon aesthetics. Japanese aesthetics is based on the spirit of *wabi* (侘び) or aesthetic value of simplicity. *Wabi* is an aesthetic value referring to tranquility, silence, darkness or gloominess [15] Clothes worn during tea ceremony (*chado*) should be simple but look beautiful, not to be conspicuous, even the host and invitees are not allowed to wear accessories, including watch. In other words, there is beauty behind all of this.

*Wabi* refers to soft things. *Wabi* as the philosophy of simplicity and natural beauty makes humans aware that in any situation there is beauty concealed behind. Thus, *wabi* is the feeling arising when seeing beauty in simplicity, far from the hustle and bustle of materialistic world. Therefore, *wabi* is a mindset of appreciating simplicity, and frugality as the way towards peace and happiness. Japanese people live under the philosophy called the concept of *wabi*. This also involves house cleaning and changing house ornaments and interior as per season.

## **Koromogae (衣替え)**

### *Meaning of Koromogae*

Denotatively, *koromogae* means 季節の変化に応じて衣服を衣服を着がえること。 *Kisetsu no henka ni oujite ifuku wo kigaeru koto*. It means to change clothes as per change in season in English [16]. By the number of forming elements, the term *koromogae* written in *kanji* into 衣替え /*koromogae* is a compound noun or in Japanese *fukugou meishi* (複合名詞). This term is composed of two morphemes {*koromo*} 'clothes' and {*gaeru*} 'change'. Morpheme {*gaeru*} is derived from verb *kaeru* (替える) 'to change' or 'to exchange'. Phoneme /k/ changes into phoneme /g/. By inter-element relation, this compound word has syntactic relation or *tougoteki kouzou* (統語的構造) object-predicate. *Koromo* serves as object and *kaeru* as predicate. Thus, it syntactically becomes *koromo o kaero koto* which means it is related to changing clothes.

### *Practice of Koromogae Culture*

Practice of *koromogae* culture includes:

#### a. Clothes Changing Activity

Watsuji (1939) explained that human's character in every region was determined by that region's climate [17]. This includes a way of dressing, where clothes are an aspect more visible than eating patterns.

Japanese people lived in the four-season country during the samurai era where the seasons changed four times annually and they adapted their dressing style as per climate in each season. However, during the Meiji era there was modernization of clothes [2]. This modernization of clothes was marked with the style of officials, their accompanying wives, including Emperor Meiji in his appearance in public space who changed his appearance by wearing Western clothes. From then on, the practice of *koromogae* culture changed from four times to twice: during entrance into summer and from fall to winter.

#### b. Washing, Storing and Sorting Activities

About three weeks after the announcement of war defeat on 11 September 1945 when the Japanese Government announced the cabinet's decision related to the national saving program [2]. In addition, there was also reformation of frugal life patterns from clothing, food, residence, and social life perspectives.

Frugal life reformation in the field of clothing includes the practice of *koromogae* culture. Thus, activities in the practice of *koromogae* culture involve good washing, storing and sorting practice activities for future use of clothes next year.

For preparation, before 1 June Japanese people start taking out their clothes for summer called *natsugi* (夏着) from storage during winter and storing their clothes for winter called *fuyugi* (冬着) that has been previously washed or aerated into a box or cupboard for future use in the next winter. On the contrary, on the first day of October the clothes for summer are stored again and clothes for winter are taken out

from storage. Besides the activities above, in *koromogae* practice, they also sort their clothes to be stored or disposed of. The purpose of washing and storing activities is to preserve the clothes for repeated uses. This is for economic saving. Besides participating in the national program of frugality, sorting activity aims to store usable clothes and dispose of or recycle unusable ones. Japanese people's non-spacious residence is one of the reasons for such sorting, since Japanese people love cleanliness. Shindo said Japanese people were hygienic [3].

The activities performed in *koromogae* culture practice are based on the spirit of *bigaku* (美学) and spirit of *mottainai* (勿体ない) as Japanese people's life.

### Wafuku (和服)

Denotatively, according to Koujien, *wafuku* means 'clothing a la Japan' [16].

わが国在来の衣服。着物。

*Waga kuni zairai no ifuku. Kimono.*

'Japanese people's authentic clothes. Kimono. [16]'

The use of term *wafuku* is as in the following sentence example.

和服の似合う女性。

*Wafuku no niau josei.*

'Women who look good wearing *wafuku*. [16]'

Japanese people have traditional clothes called *wafuku* 'clothes a la Japan' that are different from Western style clothes called *youfuku* -洋服 'clothes a la West'. *Wafuku* is literally a common term for all types of Japan traditional clothes including kimono. The prototype of *wafuku* like the current kimono started from about 1400 years ago during Heian era. Comparing to previous clothes, these seem to be under influence of Chinese culture. During Heian era the clothes worn by the nobles were multi-layered and heavy, and later in the next era the form was more practical in light colors in line with the development of advanced dip and weaving techniques [18].

*Wafuku* especially kimono is still in use in Japan by both those with interest in Japanese traditional clothes and those with certain purpose such as in ritual ceremony, official meeting, or for work purpose. The term *wafuku* started to be used during Meiji period to distinguish Japanese traditional clothes from Western style clothes. Previously, Japanese people's traditional clothes were called kimono or *kirumono*, which means something worn or clothing.

During the Meiji period, the term kimono was still in use to refer to Japan's traditional clothes, but the definition of kimono became narrower and more specific to refer to clothes as in the left figure. The left figure displays kimonos hung on special

hangers so they look like the form of their natural materials like silk, wool, linen, and cotton of different prices and designation. Formal kimonos are quite expensive. Thus, many choose to hire *furisode* because the opportunity to wear kimono is quite infrequent. This is because almost all parts of a kimono consist of straight lines with fabric of equal width from top downwards. The length of kimono for men is made touching ankles, while the length of kimono for women is made hanging onto the floor, thus adjustment is needed to user's height.

Kimono can be called ecological/recycled clothes that all parts are made of fabric of equal width, thus thinned part of the fabric can be twisted towards invisible part. Past Japanese people opened kimono stitches and washed it and then sewed it again by twisting the fabric part for longer use, or dipping it in new color. Good material based and well-maintained kimono can be used for tens of years from youth to old age or from a generation to the next generation. Currently, young generation is interested in kimono of past time sold in used kimono shops under premise of still good material or color pattern for wear or remake. Such interest is based on their high awareness of the *mottainai* attitude or reluctance to dispose of items that is still usable or awareness of the importance of environmental preservation.

*Wafuku* or kimono is diverse by situation, material, age, marital status, and season. A long-sleeve *furisode* kimono is a type to be used by unmarried women on a special day such as celebration of birthday, *seijinshiki* and attending a wedding party. The other type is *kuro tomesode*, which is a black medium-sleeve kimono for married women in very formal event, and the the last type is *iro tomesode*, colorful medium-sleeve kimono, commonly used by married women in formal occasion or during visit to others' house.

There is also a kimono for men. The kimono for men for daily use is a simpler color along with its accessories. The accessories include undergarment robe, *koshihimo* 'belt', *obi* 'wide belt', *tabi* 'special socks for kimono', and *hakimono* 'footwear'.

There is also a term of *yukata*, informal clothing for summer. Differently from kimono, *yukata* is made of cold material such as cotton and there is no inner fabric layer. The undergarment is also simple and without socks/*tabi*, and the footwear, 'bakya'. *Yukata* is written 浴衣 which means bathing clothes. The term *yukata* is derived from *yukatabira* 湯帷子 worn by nobles during Heian era for bathing. During the Edo era, *yukata* started to be worn after bathing for cool air. *Yukata* was designed fashionable and worn during the summer *matsuri*, 'festival'.

### 3 Research Method

This research was focused on *koromogae* that was analyzed based on the ethnolinguistics theory, a theory that associates language or text to culture. The method used was a qualitative descriptive one. The research data were consisted of primary data in the form of lexical data of *koromogae* and image as text. This conforms to Endraswara that in a cultural study, image can be considered a text, which is cultural text [19].

Pursuant to the issue discussed in this study, the data were analyzed in the following stages:

- a. Language analysis of lexical data of *koromogae*
- b. Analysis on the practice of *koromogae* culture arising in the source of data.

The data in the form of practices of *koromogae* culture were taken from the textbook *Manabou Nihongo-Shouchuukyuu* published in 2006 [20].

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Language Analysis on Terms in *Koromogae*

Lexically, the term *koromogae* means ‘changing clothes as per climate’ as presented in the data 1 below:

**Data 1.** Use of Terms in *Koromogae*

Context of the sentence:

The dialogue below occurred in B’s house who was waiting for *koromogae*. A was astonished seeing the clothes taken out of clothing storage piling in B’s room. Since B was quite busy with his works, B had not finished preparing the clothes.

A : わあ、服がたくさんありますね。

Waa, fuku ga takusan arimasu ne.

‘Waa, what a bunch of clothes’

B : ええ、衣替えをしようとして出したんですが、まだまだやりかけなんです。

Ee, *koromogae* o shiyou to shite dashita-n desuga, mada mada yarikake nan desu.

‘Yeah, I took out the clothes for *koromogae*, but hadn’t finished it yet.’ [20]



In the sentence above, the term *koromogae* was a noun serving as the object of the predicate *shiyou to shite dashita* which was derived from the form *shiyou to suru dashita* 'do'. By context, the term *koromogae* was translated into Japanese people's habit of changing clothes during transition between seasons, especially from summer to winter and vice versa.

The changes of transition of climates and seasons in Japan are clearly felt. In the summer the weather is quite hot, in the winter the weather is quite cold, in the spring and fall the weather feels mild. With such climate conditions in the country, Japanese people greatly appreciate the seasons, as realized in a poem "Spring is cherry blossom (*sakura*), summer is bird, *hototogisu*, fall is the moon, and winter is snow, white, clean and cold. Besides, lives, entertainments, scenery, clothes, foods and topics of discussion also obviously change following the clearly changing seasons [3]. Therefore, the background of the early practice of *koromogae* culture was the extremely changing seasonal conditions in Japan.

The analysis above is confirmed by supporting references that in Japan employees in uniform such as police, shopkeepers, and students perform *koromogae* in their uniform. They have two types of uniform: uniform for the fall/winter and for the spring/summer. However, the hot and cold air do not always come precisely as per calendar. Therefore, today's determination of 1 June and 1 October is only the standard for *koromogae*, thus employees or students have the liberty to choose appropriate time to change their respective seasonal uniforms. Students must buy two types of uniform when just entering school for 3-year use, which is quite a burden for the parents for their high price. Uniforms for winter are made of wool for warmth, and uniforms for summer are made of cotton or polyester for mildness. For employees, the uniform is prepared by the government or their company.

So, in the practice of *koromogae* culture, there are deep cultural values; from the practice of changing from clothes for summer with short sleeves and mild material to clothes for winter with long sleeves and thick basic material or vice versa; we may observe that Japanese people in their life adapt to the nature and time.

#### 4.2 Analysis of the Practice of *Koromogae* Culture

Besides the activity of changing clothes during seasonal transition, the whole practice of *koromogae* culture is closely related to other activities pursuant to Japanese climate conditions. Some of the cultural practices accompanying the *koromogae* activity are storing, washing, and sorting clothes. Clothes for summer (*natsugi*) and for winter (*fuyugi*) are sorted, grouped, and stored in clearly distinguished storages. Each of the storages for clothes for summer is marked with kanji in front of the cupboard. The same also applies to the cupboard for storing clothes for winter. Japanese people are strict regarding grouping. Partitions are made as clearly as possible. This conforms to Shindo that Japanese people have a strong sense of group orientation [3].

Clothes for summer and winter made of cotton or wool are generally stored without being folded in a cupboard or storage box. However, they are stored aerated or hung in hangers in *-ire* (押し入れ). Based on the results of analysis on Japanese people's habit of sorting and storing their clothes in *koromogae*, Japanese people live with the nature/love nature (in Japanese called *shizen o mederu*- 自然を愛でる). Japanese people's love for nature from ancient times is rooted in religiosity. Until now, nature influences their daily rhythm and rituals of life.

With regard to Japanese people's special attention to change in seasons, cultural practice of washing, storing clothes well and neatly for future use in the next season accompany *koromogae* activities. This expresses that Japanese people make use of items that are still usable, reducing their needs economically. Besides, in the data there are two-line hanging racks with simply turning it over in case of changing seasons; storage boxes are stored with front-back position and in case of *koromogae* they would just simply turn over the boxes.

Such cultural practice conforms to the Japanese Home Affairs Minister's national campaign in 1919 of establishing frugal life for improved life prosperity [21]. Life prosperity for each individual of Japanese people means building the prosperity of the whole Japanese people. There is no person to disturb others. This way, interpersonal harmony will be realized. In this case, the *koromogae* culture contains quite deep values that are peer-oriented. Based on the results of analysis along with other references regarding how Japanese people store their clothes during *koromogae*, it is common knowledge that they are highly effective and economic, still taking aesthetic values into consideration. The existence of *oshi-ire* (押し入れ) that is part of Japanese house structure can lead aesthetics and economy to harmony or *wa* (和) to form *wabi* in Japanese house.

The current *koromogae* works are considered quite troublesome due to the narrowness of houses in urban areas, rendering storage limited. Therefore, in Japan there are various tools on sale to solve such issues. Therefore, it creates the philosophy of *wabi*.

*Wabi* refers to soft things. *Wabi* as the philosophy of simplicity and natural beauty has humans aware that there is beauty hidden in any situation. Thus, *wabi* is the feeling arising when seeing beauty in simplicity, far from the hustle and bustle of the materialistic world. Therefore, *wabi* is a mindset of appreciating simplicity, and frugality as the path towards peace and happiness. Japanese people live under the philosophy called the concept of *wabi*. This also involves house cleaning and changing house ornament and interior as per season.

## 5 Conclusion

Based on the description above, it is identified that *koromogae* as a cultural practice is Japanese people's alignment to the nature in adapting to the environment. Besides, of the whole cultural practices, there are also cultural values identified that Japanese people have aesthetic and frugal values for self-prosperity as individual and national prosperity for the nation. In addition, adaptation to natural conditions (based on the *wabi* mindset), as Japanese people's unique identity, contains the following cultural values e.g., aesthetics and hygiene (*bigaku* "aesthetic" value (despite simplicity) and frugality (*mottainai* value) [14].

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